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ABSTRACT

The study examined the Philadelphia school district's program for mildly handicapped students. It provided descriptive data related to mixed categorical classes, described students enrolled in the mildly handicapped program, provided descriptive data on the content of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and attempted to determine the usefulness of the IEP document to teachers in the field. Twenty-two specific research questions were addressed. The study identified four implications for educational practice: (1) The problem of poor school attendance must be addressed; (2) Teacher training in effective instructional methods is necessary; (3) The IEP, as a mechanism for helping teachers plan for and deliver instruction, should be reevaluated; and (4) Clarification of the relationships among the IEP, grading guidelines, and the standardized curriculum appears necessary. Future research into such areas as the application of Effective Schools Research to the teaching of mildly handicapped students is recommended. (DB)

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MILDLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS
IN THE
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA:

A STUDY OF SELECTED STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
AND
PROGRAM ELEMENTS



A CHART ESSAY

Written by

NANCY J. MCGINLEY

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DESIGN OF THE INQUIRY

The major purpose of this study was to examine the School District of Philadelphia's program for mildly handicapped students.

The four specific tasks for this inquiry were:

- * To provide descriptive data related to mixed categorical classes.
 - * To describe students enrolled in the mildly handicapped program.
 - * To provide descriptive data on the content of IEPs.
 - * To determine the usefulness of the IEP document to teachers in the field.
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MOTIVATION FOR CONDUCTING THE STUDY

Why was the study conducted?

Pennsylvania State Law requires that students who are mildly handicapped be enrolled in a school program which is designed to meet the specific needs of their particular handicap. In most school districts, classes which service Educable Mentally Retarded, Learning Disabled and Socially/Emotionally Disturbed students are single categorical classes. In Philadelphia, at the secondary level, the overwhelming majority of mildly handicapped students are enrolled in mixed categorical classes. As required by law, the School District annually submits a request for a "variance" which allows the practice of enrolling mildly handicapped students in mixed categorical classes to continue. A report on the the status of the mixed categorical program is required annually.

Mixed Categorical Grouping of mildly handicapped students is a practice which raises concerns for some educators. In order to protect the students from possible detrimental side effects of an innovative method of organizing a Special Education program, the School District has conducted its own inquiry into the status of the program. The information gathered during this investigation can be used to guide future decisions about the education of mildly handicapped students.

The Usefulness of the IEP has come into question repeatedly during the past few years when teachers have been asked for feedback about the Special Education program. This study has addressed some of the specific concerns which were raised by teachers on the Curriculum Review days.

PRIOR RESEARCH and AREAS OF CONCERN

What have prior studies revealed about the education of mildly handicapped students in Philadelphia?

PRIOR RESEARCH

Item 1 : Teacher Concerns About Mixed Categorical Classes

In the School District of Philadelpha's first report on mixed categorical grouping (# 8336, July 1983) the following finding was reported:

"Even though the mixed categorical classes were to be comprised of students with similar educational functioning levels, most teachers still reported wide discrepancies in skill levels within each group of students within a class."

Some teachers reported an increase in classroom discipline problems (which they attributed to the presence of SED students). They said they had also encountered instructional problems due to large differences in student achievement levels.

Item 2 : Reading Achievement Levels of LD Students in Single Categorical Classes

A 1983-84 study (Report No. 8431) found that LD students had reading achievement levels which consistently fell below the levels of regular education students of the same chronological age. At age seven, LD students were found to be one year behind their peers in regular education. At age ten, they were two and a half years behind. At age thirteen (junior high) they were four years behind and by age fifteen (high school) they were six years behind students in regular education.

Item 3 : Student Attendance in Mixed Categorical Classes

An analysis of computer files on attendance (Report # 8618, January 1986) found that Regular education students had better attendance than Resource Room students, and they in turn had better attendance than students in the Part Time Mixed Categorical classes.

Item 4 : Career/Vocational Education IEP Objectives

A study conducted during the 1982-83 school year (Report #8504) found that only 53% of high students in the mildly handicapped program had specific references to career and/or vocational education goals on their IEP.

Item 5 : Teacher Perceptions of and Classroom Characteristics in the School District's Program for EMR Students

A study focusing on EMR students in single and mixed categorical classes (Report # 8708, 1986) reported that:

1. Progress in academic skills appeared minimal for EMR students.
2. The program may not be realistically addressing the educational needs and abilities of EMR students.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Item 1 : Teacher Concerns About Mixed Categorical Classes

The problems encountered by teachers in mixed categorical classes can be lessened if academic ability is considered when students are rostered into classes for all subjects.

The ability of teachers to handle disruptive students may be a problem that needs to be addressed in the future through staff development.

Item 2 : Reading Achievement Levels of LD Students in Single Categorical Classes

It appears that efforts to remediate the reading deficits of Learning Disabled students are only minimally effective.

Item 3 : Student Attendance in Mixed Categorical Classes

Sporadic attendance contributes to school failure. The problem of poor attendance may continue to worsen if the curriculum is appropriate for higher functioning students or if students see little connection between skills being taught in class and those needed in life.

Item 4 : Career/Vocational Education IEP Objectives

Schools that identify a career or vocational objective on the IEP appear to be concerned with the future of their mildly handicapped students.

Item 5 : Teacher Perceptions and Classroom
Characteristics of the School District's
Program for EMR Students

The curriculum offered to mildly handicapped students may not be addressing the needs of students who have below normal intelligence.

WHO WERE THE SUBJECTS FOR THIS STUDY?

The information contained in this report was obtained from:

- * student confidential records
- * classroom observations
- * teacher interviews

Records on a total of one hundred and sixty-three (163) mildly handicapped students, in a variety of placements, were reviewed during April, May and June of 1987. Eighty-four (84) Learning Disabled (LD), sixty-six (66) Socially-Emotionally Disturbed (SED) and thirteen (13) EMR students were randomly selected for this study. The selection of students was proportional to the enrollment of the various mildly handicapped exceptionalities in both the seven subdistricts and at the various school organizational levels within the District. The randomly selected students about whom specific Special Education data were gathered also defined the sample of teachers to be interviewed and classes to be observed.

The information from this study was added to file data on sixty-six (66) Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) students which was collected in the the Spring of 1986. File data from both the 1986 and the 1987 study was used to answer questions pertaining to the personal characteristics of mildly handicapped students.

Number of Teachers Interviewed

136

Number of Classes Observed

118

Fifty-four percent of the teachers who were interviewed taught mixed categorical classes. The remaining forty-six per cent of the teachers who were interviewed taught classes which served a single exceptionality of students. The majority of elementary classes served a single category of students but, only two single categorical classes were found at the high school level. Therefore, when comparing data on mixed categorical classes to data on single categorical classes the difference in school level must be considered.

HOW DID WE MEASURE THE STATUS OF THE PROGRAM FOR MILDLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS?

The Special Education Research and Evaluation Unit (SEREU) developed three instruments to gather data pertaining to the School District's program for mildly handicapped students. These instruments were used to gather file data on each of the individual students, record teacher answers to a questionnaire and, report on the activities observed during classroom observations.

Data Collection

From the file data we tabulated information on the student's exceptionality, age, I.Q., type of assignment and his/her (grade equivalent) mathematics and reading level. We also noted the curricular areas for which there were objectives on his/her IEP. For each student in the sample, we recorded this information for the current year (1986-87) and also for the year the student entered the Special Education program.

Teacher Input

Teachers were asked to provide information on the composition of their class in terms of age span, achievement range, enrollment and student exceptionality. They were also asked questions concerning instructional approach, student progress and the compatibility of students within a class.

Teachers were asked to answer several questions regarding the usefulness of the IEP. Teacher responses were separated according to the level of the school (elementary, jr. high, high school).

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations yielded information about student attendance, in-class grouping practices and types of instructional activities. Researchers also noted behavior management techniques and recorded other information relevant to the instructional program.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

What is the composition of mixed categorical classes with regard to the exceptionality of the students?

<u>MIXED CATEGORICAL CLASSES</u> <u>AVERAGE ENROLLMENT BY EXCEPTIONALITY</u> =====			
<u>Organization</u> <u>Type</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>		
	<u>EMR</u>	<u>SED</u>	<u>LD</u>
ELEMENTARY	1	2	8
JR. HIGH/MIDDLE	1	2	8
HIGH SCHOOL	1	3	6

Comments

- * Typical mixed categorical classes at the elementary level and junior high school level had 1 EMR, 2 SED and 8 LD students.
- * In the average high school class there were 1 EMR, 3 SED and 6 LD students.
- * 9% of the students in mixed categorical classes were EMR.
- * 22% of the students in mixed categorical classes were SED.
- * 69% of the students in mixed categorical classes were LD.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

How many ages are typically represented in classes for mildly handicapped students?

MEAN AGE SPAN WITHIN CLASSES

Organization Type	Mixed Categorical	Single Categorical
ELEMENTARY	3 years	3 years
JR./MIDDLE	3 years	3 years
HIGH SCHOOL	4 years	3 years

Trends

- * The average age span in both mixed category and single category classes at the elementary and junior high school level was 3 years.
- * Teachers of mixed categorical high school classes reported an average age span of 4 years.
- * In the two single categorical high school classes there was a three year age span.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

How many different (Mathematics and Reading) Achievement Levels are found in mixed categorical and single categorical classes for mildly handicapped students?

AVG. NUMBER OF ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS WITHIN A CLASS *
(by grade equivalent measure)

=====

SUBJECT	MIXED CATEGORY CLASSES	SINGLE CATEGORY CLASSES
READING	3.6	4.3
MATHEMATICS	3.6	3.3

* Achievement levels reported for Resource Room students were not included in the averages reported above.

Comments

- * Single categorical classes had a wider variation in student achievement levels than mixed categorical classes.
- * The average number of achievement levels in both reading and mathematics in single categorical classes at the elementary level was 3.
- * The average number of reading levels in mixed categorical high school classes was 3 and the average number of mathematics levels was 5.
- * Direct comparisons by school level cannot be made because of the relatively small number of single categorical classes at the secondary level and the similarly small number of mixed categorical classes at the elementary level.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

How many students are enrolled in each class?

AVERAGE ENROLLMENT MILDLY HANDICAPPED CLASSES

School	No. of Classes	Lowest No. Students	Highest No. Students	Avg.	Pa. Max. Students Mix.Cat.
El	46	5	16	11.5	15 *
Jr	43	6	18	11.5	15
HS	32	8	16	13	15

* Single categorical elementary EMR classes may have only 12 students enrolled.

Comments

- * Classes serving mildly handicapped students in the School District of Philadelphia have an average student enrollment which is below the maximum enrollment permitted by State regulations.
- * In Pennsylvania, both single categorical and mixed categorical high school classes may have a maximum of fifteen (15) students per class.
- * According to teacher reported enrollment figures, high school classes have the highest number of students on roll.

RESEARCH QUESTION FIVE

How are students grouped for instruction
within the classroom?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES INVOLVING WHOLE CLASS VS. GROUP/INDIVIDUAL APPROACH

Organization Type	Approach to Instruction	
	Whole Class	Group or Individual
Elementary	66%	34%
Jr. High	73%	27%
High School	65%	35%

Comments

- * Group or individualized instruction was observed to occur more frequently when an aide was present in the classroom.
- * In classes without an aide, students received group or individualized instruction less than one fourth of the time.

RESEARCH QUESTION SIX

What type of learning activities are used in the classroom?

TYPES OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

=====	
Subject	Most Typical Learning Activities Observed

Mathematics	Teachers provided a brief explanation of a concept or procedure (which often included a few, representative, examples on the blackboard). This was generally followed by worksheets which students completed at their desks.
Reading/ Language Arts	Teachers typically used worksheets to reinforce skills or to provide seatwork when the focus of instruction was grammar or vocabulary. When students were working on reading comprehension the teacher usually assigned the class (or reading group) a few paragraphs, or sentences, to read either silently or orally (one student at a time). Following the reading assignment, the teacher asked students to orally respond to questions on the main idea, story details, characters, or sequence.
Social Studies and Science	Very few classroom observations were conducted in classes where the focus of instruction was Science or Social Studies. Therefore, descriptions of typical lessons in these areas can not be given at this time.

Comments

- * Learning activities varied somewhat with the subject. However, examples of practical applications of skills or concepts were noticeably lacking.
- * Since students were generally asked oral (rather than written) questions concerning reading comprehension, this finding may have implications for how mildly handicapped students respond to written questions on standardized tests.

RESEARCH QUESTION SEVEN

What do Report Card grades tell us about achievement
by mildly handicapped students?

Report Card Grades In Mixed Categorical Classes

Teachers were asked to provide measures of student achievement in the form of Report Card grades for Reading and Mathematics. Each teacher was requested to report Reading and Mathematics grades for:

- . the lowest functioning student in the class
- . the highest functioning student in the class

PROPORTION OF STUDENTS FROM EACH MILDLY HANDICAPPED
EXCEPTIONALITY REPORTED TO BE FUNCTIONING AT THE LOWEST OR
THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF THEIR MIXED CATEGORICAL CLASS

	Exceptionality		
	EMR	SED	LD
Lowest Functioning Student	28%	10%	62%
Highest Functioning Student	5%	21%	73%
Class Enrollment	9%	22%	69%

Comments

- * In mixed categorical classes, EMR students are the only group of students who, by definition, have IQ scores that are below normal.
- * In classes with students with normal IQs, EMR students were identified by the teacher as the highest achieving, or functioning student in the class in 5% of the cases.
- * SED students were identified as the lowest student in the class in 10% of the cases. This figure was substantially lower than the percentage of SED students in mixed categorical classes (22%).

RESEARCH QUESTION EIGHT

What kinds of progress do teachers see in the classroom?

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS

Area of Progress	Mixed Categorical Classes	Single Categorical Classes		
		EMR	LD	SED
Academic	51%	73%	71%	47%
Behavior, Attitude, or Effort	49%	26%	28%	53%

Comments

- * Examples of progress given by teachers of mixed categorical classes involved changes in student behavior, attitude or effort nearly as frequently as they cited progress in academic skills.
- * Teachers of single categorical SED classes mentioned progress in behavior, attitude or effort more than progress in academic skills. Teachers of SED students may view improving student behavior as a prerequisite to improving academic skills.
- * The findings in this study support previous findings about teachers' perceptions of progress. A 1986 study of EMR students (Report #8504) found that progress in academic skills was minimal. At the high school level, examples of progress (for EMR students) typically involved social rather than academic skills.
- * In the data reported above, the majority of teachers of single categorical EMR and LD classes cited progress in academic skills.
- * Since the majority of single categorical classes were found at the elementary level and the majority of mixed categorical classes were found at the high school level, the implications of these data may relate more to school level than to concerns surrounding mixed categorical grouping.

RESEARCH QUESTION NINE

Do teachers believe students are appropriately grouped
for instruction?

DO THE STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS BELONG TOGETHER AS AN
INSTRUCTIONAL GROUP?

Teachers of:	Response	
	Yes	No
Single Categorical Classes	42% (21)	58% (29)
Mixed Categorical Classes	45% (28)	55% (34)

Comments

- * Teacher response did not appear to be based upon whether the class was designated a single categorical or mixed categorical group.
- * The teachers who stated that their class did not belong together said that they felt that way due to wide variations in age, academic ability, or behavior within the class.
- * This study found that (on average) there was a wider range of reading abilities within the single categorical classes. (Research Question 3)
- * Teachers of mixed categorical classes who stated that their students belonged together as an instructional group made statements such as:
 - " ... peer tutoring occurs."
 - " Mixed categorical is not a problem. They pretty much all need what is being taught."
 - "They learn from each other in mixed category."
 - "It provides for an interesting interaction."

RESEARCH QUESTION TEN

What is the attendance in the mildly handicapped program?

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE IN FULL AND PART TIME CLASSES

Organization Type	No. of Observations Observations **	Avg. No. of Students Present
Elementary	55	9.4
Jr./Middle	42	9.3
High School	24	5.7

** Attendance was recorded during classroom observations.

AVERAGE NO. OF DAYS ABSENT DURING THE 1985-86 SCHOOL YEAR

Type of Assignment	Average No. Days Absent	No. of Cases
Resource Room	20	(36)
Mixed		
Categorical, Part time	30	(52)
Full Time	16	(4)
Single		
Categorical, Part Time	22	(16)
Full Time	13	(90)

Comments

- * Students in Part Time classes had a greater number of absences than students in the Resource Room. This finding was consistent with the findings of two previous computerized attendance studies.
- * Fewer absences in the Full Time classes may be accounted for by the fact that the majority of FT classes were found at the elementary school level.
- * Although high school classes had the highest no. of students on roll, they had the lowest in attendance.

RESEARCH QUESTION ELEVEN

At what age do Mildly Handicapped students typically enter the Special Education Program?

AVERAGE AGE OF ENTRY INTO SPECIAL EDUCATION

Exceptionality	Average Age
EMR	8 years
LD	8 years
SED	9 years

Comments

- * Eighty-six percent (86%) of the EMR students in the sample had been identified as exceptional and were attending special classes by the time they were ten years of age.
- * Eighty-four percent (84%) of the LD students in the sample had been identified as exceptional and were attending special classes by the time they were ten years of age.
- * Seventy-six percent (76%) of the SED students in the sample had been identified as exceptional and were attending special classes by the time they were ten years of age.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWELVE

Are there differences in the average achievement levels of students from the various exceptionalities?

AVERAGE GRADE EQUIVALENT READING LEVEL BY AGE

Age	Exceptionality					
	EMR		LD		SED	
	No. Students	Avg. Level	No. Students	Avg. Level	No. Students	Avg. Level
6	(12)	.13	(18)	.20	(16)	.26
8	(14)	1.06	(20)	1.08	(13)	.99
10	(15)	1.36	(27)	1.78	(22)	1.87
12	(5)	2.20	(19)	2.26	(17)	3.10
15	(15)	2.51	(13)	5.17	(14)	4.08

AVERAGE GRADE EQUIVALENT MATH LEVEL BY AGE

Age	Exceptionality					
	EMR		LD		SED	
	No. Students	Avg. Level	No. Students	Avg. Level	No. Students	Avg. Level
6	(12)	.10	(18)	.30	(16)	.37
8	(14)	1.14	(20)	1.60	(13)	1.83
10	(15)	1.96	(27)	2.23	(22)	2.73
12	(5)	2.40	(19)	2.82	(17)	3.59
15	(15)	2.28	(13)	5.38	(14)	4.72

Comments

- * Cross-sectional data showed that EMR students had lower achievement levels at virtually every age.
- * Records showed very little difference in the average Reading and Mathematics levels of EMR, LD, and SED students between the ages of six and ten.

RESEARCH QUESTION THIRTEEN

What is the average I.Q. of EMR, LD and SED students in the mildly handicapped program?

AVERAGE I.Q. BY EXCEPTIONALITY

Exceptionality	Range		Average I.Q.
	Minimum	Maximum	
EMR (N = 79)	43	83	63
LD (N = 84)	64	120	86
SED (N = 66)	66	124	91

Comments

- * The average I.Q. scores reported above represent scores for mildly handicapped students who are assigned to Full Time and Part Time classes and to the Resource Room.
- * According to the Pa. Special Education Manual EMR students are described as students who have an I.Q. score which is between 55 and 80.
- * EMR students in this study had an average I.Q. score in the lower range of the span.
- * LD and SED students in this study had average I.Q. scores in the low-normal range.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOURTEEN

What do teachers consider "special" in what they do to help mildly handicapped students?

Characteristics of Instructional Specialness As Reported By Teachers

Response Category	Teacher Responses	
	Number	Percent
Specific Instructional/ Behavior Managemt. Tech.	76	28
Whole Child/Affective	57	21
Individualization	54	20
Vary Expectations	30	11
Repetition/Review	20	7
Concrete/Practical	19	7
Supports/Materials	17	6
Total	273	100

Comments

- * The wide variation in teacher responses indicates that teachers might benefit from training in methods of instruction shown to be effective with specific exceptionalities of students.
- * The majority of the examples cited by teachers of both mixed categorical and single categorical classes tended to fall into three major categories:
 1. Individualization - Example: "Try to work one on one."
 2. Work with the Whole Child (Affective) - Example: "Try to understand each student on a personal level."
 3. Specific instructional/behavior management technique - Example: " Daily behavior chart."

RESEARCH QUESTION FIFTEEN

Do teachers record their "special" instructional approach
on a student's IEP?

TEACHERS WHO RECORD THEIR "SPECIAL" INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH ON AN IEP

Teacher Responses	Number	%
Yes	(56)	49%
No	(61)	51%
Total	117	100%

Comments

- * Teachers who said they included their special approaches or techniques on the IEP made statements such as:
 - "I write about the student's learning style.";
 - "I include notes on their social/emotional level.";
 - "I note things that optimize learning."
- * Teachers who said they do not include their own special approach or technique on the IEP gave explanations such as:
 - "The IEP is not conducive to that.";
 - "Each person (teacher) has his/her own style. What works for me may not work for someone else.";
 - "The IEP is more of a skill checklist."

RESEARCH QUESTION SIXTEEN

Do the IEPs of Socially/Emotionally Disturbed (SED) students contain social-emotional or counseling objectives?

SED STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL OR COUNSELING OBJECTIVES ON THEIR IEPs

=====

IEP Contains:

	Soc/Emotional Objective	Prescribed Counseling	Soc/Emotional or Couns. Obj.
Percentage of SED Students	53%	56%	73%

=====

Comments

- * According to the School District's Intermediate Unit (I.U.) Plan, Psychological and Psychiatric services are provided to: conduct diagnostic evaluations; identify appropriate placement; and, make programmatic/therapeutic recommendations for SED students.
- * The I.U. Plan states that the School Counselor is expected to conduct special counseling with exceptional students and to implement plans of action based on identified counseling needs.
- * Less than seventy-five per cent of the IEPs for Socially/Emotionally Disturbed students either prescribed counseling for the student or, included a social/emotional objective.
- * School Counselors frequently stated that CSET procedures consumed so much of their time that they had little time to spend working directly with students.

RESEARCH QUESTION SEVENTEEN

Do high school students in the mildly handicapped program have career or vocational objectives on their IEPs?

STUDENTS IN THE STUDY WITH CAREER OR VOCATIONAL OBJECTIVES INCLUDED ON THEIR IEP

IEPs for
High School
Students (over
13 years of age) 50% have either a
career or a
vocational
education objective

Comments

- * In Philadelphia, during the (1984-85) school year, 11.5% of Special Education students and 12.5% of Regular Education students were enrolled in vocational education courses.
- * During the 1986-87 school year, 13% of the EMR students in the District were enrolled in at least one vocational course. (46% of the EMR high school population)
- * During the 1986-87 school year, 12% of the SED students in the District were enrolled in at least one vocational course. (45% of the SED high school population)
- * During the 1986-87 school year, 15% of the LD students in the District were enrolled in at least one vocational course. (50% of the LD high school population)
- * Enrollment in a vocational course should not be confused with enrollment in a career preparation program. The data referred to above includes mildly handicapped students enrolled in a vocational course lasting only one semester and those who are taking courses at the introductory level only.

RESEARCH QUESTION EIGHTEEN

Is the IEP format useful to teachers in helping them decide:

- * What to teach?
- * What strategies to use for each student?
- * What each student's learning strengths and weaknesses are?
- * What is the best way to organize for instruction?

TEACHER RESPONSES CONCERNING THE USEFULNESS OF THE IEP

Things to Decide:	Teacher Responses	
	Useful	Not Useful
What to teach.....	46%	54%
What strategies to use.....	25%	75%
Students' learning strengths & weaknesses.....	43%	57%
How to organize for instruction	43%	57%

Comments

- * One out of five (21%) teachers stated that the IEP was not useful to them in making decisions involving what to teach, what strategies to use, what an individual student's strengths and weaknesses are or how the class should be organized for instruction.
- * Many teachers stated that students' learning strengths and weaknesses were either inaccurate or were not included at all on IEPs.

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RESEARCH QUESTION NINETEEN

When the IEP is not used, how do teachers decide
what to teach?

HOW TEACHERS DETERMINE WHAT TO TEACH

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<u>Rank Order</u>	<u>Teacher Responses</u>
1	Use formal and informal tests (teacher made tests, CRTs, IRIs, levels tests, etc.)
2	Follow the Standardized Curriculum and/or the Pacing Schedule

Trends

- * Over half of the teachers (54%) said that they did not use the IEP in deciding what to teach.
 - * Teachers used their own tests to determine what to teach because they felt the information in the IEP was not specific enough or because they have found a lack of standardized information (i.e. it is often unclear whether "Reading level 3" is a book level or a grade equivalent level).
 - * Some teachers indicated that the Standardized Curriculum negated the importance of the IEP in decisions concerning what to teach.
-

RESEARCH QUESTION TWENTY

When the IEP is not used, how do teachers decide what strategies to use for each student?

WHAT DETERMINES THE STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE

<u>Rank</u> <u>Order</u>	<u>Teacher</u> <u>Response</u>
1	Teaching experience, trial and error
2	Student learning style, or student needs
3	Formal or informal tests
4	Material available
4	Consultations with I.A., or "Methods Books"

Comments

- * Three fourths (75%) of the teachers said that IEPs were not helpful to them in making decisions concerning what strategies to use for each student.
- * Teaching experience and trial and error were reported to be the most typical determinant of teaching strategy.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWENTY-ONE

When the IEP is not used, how do teachers determine what each student's learning strengths and weaknesses are?

METHODS UTILIZED BY TEACHERS IN DETERMINING STUDENTS' LEARNING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

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Typical Responses

"I do my own informal testing."

"I observe how they function in the classroom."

"I use I.R.I.s"

"Diagnostic testing."

Comments

- * Over half of the teachers (57%) said that they did not use the IEP to determine students' strengths and weaknesses.
- * Observation of students in the classroom, and/or formal and informal testing were the methods most teachers utilized to determine students' strengths and weaknesses.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWENTY-TWO

When the IEP is not used, how do teachers decide
the best way to organize for instruction?

WHAT IS USEFUL TO TEACHERS IN DECIDING THE BEST WAY TO ORGANIZE FOR INSTRUCTION

<u>Rank</u> <u>Order</u>	<u>Teacher</u> <u>Response</u>
1	Testing, observation of student needs
2	Classroom interaction (how students get along)
3	Standardized Curriculum
3	Teacher experience with different approaches
3	School organization, physical environment, materials available

Comments

- * The majority of the teachers used some type of formal or informal testing to determine how to organize for instruction.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As a result of this study what are the implications for practice and directions for future research?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study suggest the following implications to administrators, program planners and teachers:

Implication One. To increase learning outcomes for mildly handicapped students, the problem of poor school attendance must be addressed.

Implication Two. Based upon the responses to the questionnaire, it appears that teacher training in effective instructional methods is necessary.

Implication Three. The IEP, as a mechanism for helping teachers plan for and deliver instruction, should be re-evaluated.

Implication Four. Clarification of the relationships among the IEP, grading guidelines and the standardized curriculum appears necessary.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Concern One. Given the limited sample of students and teachers, many of the questions in this study may require further investigation.

Concern Two. An ORE study (soon to be released) on the Role of the Counselor should provide insight into problems encountered by counselors as they attempt to deliver the services which are specified on student IEPs.

Concern Three. An investigation into the application of Effective Schools Research to the teaching of mildly handicapped students appears to be warranted.

RELEVANT SCHOOL DISTRICT REPORTS

- July, 1983 "Mixed Categorical Classes Evaluation Report"
Report No. 8336, Prepared by Alvin Elinow
- May, 1984 "Status Report of the Learning Disabilities
Program: Characteristics of Students and
Practices 1983 -1984" Report No. 8431,
Prepared by Kenneth W. Prusso, et al
- Sept., 1984 "Career and Vocational Education Training
Program 1982-1983" Report No.8504,
Prepared by Alvin Elinow
- Jan., 1986 "A Preliminary Study of Mixed Categorical
Programs Students' Attendance and Marks: 1984-
1985" Report No. 8618, Prepared by Kenneth
W. Prusso
- Feb., 1987 "Review of Teacher Perceptions and Classroom
Characteristics for an Initial Study of
Educable Mentally Retarded Students in the
School District of Philadelphia"
Report No. 8708, Prepared by Nancy J. McGinley

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